

Message Text

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62

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SUBJECT: TORRIJOS ON TREATY NEGOTIATION

REF: FBIS 2218502 DEC 1974

SUMMARY: IN REMARKS DURING DECEMBER 21 PRESS CONFERENCE.
GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS REAFFIRMED HIS FAITH IN THE CANAL TREATY
NEGOTIATIONS, THE NEED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY DURING THE TALKS,
AND HIS HOPE THAT A NEW TREATY CAN BE CONCLUDED DURING THE
FIRST HALF OF 1975. END SUMMARY.

1. CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS--ACCOMPANIED
BY AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES GONZALEZ REVILLA--ADDRESSED
QUESTIONS ON THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATION DURING COURSE OF
DECEMBER 21 PRESS CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY LOCAL FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION. THEIR COMMENTS--THE SALIENT
PORTIONS OF WHICH FOLLOW--HAVE BEEN ACCORDED EXTENSIVE
COVERAGE IN THE LOCAL MEDIA.

2. IN RESPONSE TO A QUERY CONCERNING THE CLOSENESS OF
AN AGREEMENT, TORRIJOS REMARKED THAT THE NEGOTIATION--
BASED ON A "NEW PHILOSOPHY" WHICH DEALS WITH THE
CANAL PROBLEM AS IT IS MORE THAN WITH HISTORY--WAS
MOVING RAPIDLY. "WE HAVE MADE UP OUR MINDS TO WORK
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RAPIDLY...I THINK THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING...DURING THE

FIRST HALF OF 1975 WE WILL HAVE A TREATY. AND, HE ADDED,
"I BELIEVE IT IS A TREATY THAT THE PEOPLE ARE GOING
TO ACCEPT."

3. WITH REGARD TO THE NATURE OF THE TREATY, THE GENERAL
REGRETTED THAT HE COULD NOT BE MORE SPECIFIC BUT EMPHASIZED
THAT, APART FROM A BILATERAL AGREEMENT NOT TO REVEAL
AGREEMENTS BEFORE THE NEGOTIATION WAS CONCLUDED, IT WAS
ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE NEGOTIATION.
"TO SAY MORE", SAID TORRIJOS, "WOULD BE TO SACRIFICE THE
NATIONAL INTEREST." THE GENERAL DID SAY THAT HE NEEDS "A
TREATY THAT PROVIDES ANSWERS, THAT DECOLONIZES", NOT AN
AGREEMENT "BASED ON CONCEPT THAT THE ZONE GETS SMALLER" BUT
ONE "BASED ON THE FACT THAT EVERYTHING IS PANAMANINA
TERRITORY."

4. AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA, FOR HIS PART, STATED THAT
"THERE ARE STILL FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES TO BE NEGOTIATED BUT
WE SEE POSSIBILITIES OF AGREEMENT," HE ADDED THAT INFORMAL
TALKS HAVE BEEN HELD "ABOUT THE REMAINING
HARD SUBJECTS AND IT IS FORESEEN THAT AN AGREEMENT
WILL BE REACHED EVEN THOUGH AT THIS TIME THESE SUBJECTS
HAVE NOT BEEN DISCUSSED AT LENGTH." TORRIJOS REPORTEDLY
INTERJECTED THAT THE QUESTION OF ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO
PANAMA HAD NOT ET BEEN TAKEN UP BECAUSE PANAMA HAD INSISTED
THAT THE ISSUE OF JURISDICTION BE SETTLED FIRST. WHEN
AKSED ABOUT UNITED STATES RATIFICATION OF A NEW TREATY,
GONZALEZ REVILLA IS REPORTED TO HAVE STATED THAT IGNORANCE
IN THE U.S. OF THE CANAL QUESTION IS THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM.
IGNORANCE, HE SAID, CAUSES FEAR. PANAMA'S ADVANTAGE IS
THAT THE CANAL PROBLEM IS NOT A VITAL ISSUE TO THE U.S.
AS IT IS TO PANAMA. THE USG, ACCORDING TO THE AMBASSADOR,
WILL HAVE TO EXERCISE A STRONG INITIATIVE WITH THE CONGRESS,
AN EFFORT THAT IN HIS VIEW WILL REQUIRE A GOOD DEAL OF
EDUCATION. WITH REFERENCE TO THE THIRTY-FOUR SENATORS WHO
HAD SIGNED RESOLUTION OPPOSING A NEW TREATY, GONZALEZ
REVILLA WAS REPORTED IN THE PRESS TO HAVE COMMENTED THAT
HE HAD SPOKEN WITH SOME OF THEM AND THAT A SUBSTANTIAL
NUMBER WERE "MODIFIABLE."

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5. COMMENT: TORRIJOS' COMMENTS--AND THOSE OF GONZALEZ
REVILLA--REFLECT THE GOP'S STRONG COMMITMENT TO A TREATY
AND ITS CONFIDENCE IN THE PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATION.
WHILE OTHER RECENT STATEMENTS BY TORRIJOS HAVE INDICATED
HIS HOPEFULNESS FOR THE NEGOTIATION, THIS WAS THE
MOST EXPLICIT AND POSITIVE EXPRESSION OF HIS CONFIDENCE
AND COMMITMENT.
JORDEN

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